

# *Social Security*

---

What Every  
Woman  
Should  
Know



## Social Security And Today's Woman

Nearly every American—man, woman and child—has Social Security protection, either as a worker or as a dependent of a worker. When the program began in 1935, Social Security benefits were limited to retired or deceased workers and their families, and most workers were men. Most women did not work outside the home.

Today, the role of women is far different. Nearly 60 percent of all women are in the nation's workforce. Many women work throughout their adult life. Although Social Security has always provided benefits for women, it has taken on added significance. More women work, pay Social Security taxes and earn credit toward a monthly income for their retirement. Women with children earn Social Security protection for themselves and their families. This could mean monthly benefits to a woman and her family if she becomes disabled and can no longer work. If she dies, her survivors may be eligible for benefits.

Although some women choose a lifetime career outside the home, many women work for a few years, leave the labor force to raise their children, and then return to work. Some women choose not to work outside their home. They usually are covered by Social Security through their husband's work and can receive benefits when he retires, becomes disabled or dies.

Whether a woman works, has worked or has never worked, it is important that she know exactly what Social Security coverage means to her. She also should know about Social Security coverage for anyone she may hire as a household worker or provider of child care. She needs to know what to do if she changes her name. And she needs to know that if she receives a pension for work not covered by Social Security, her Social Security benefits could be affected.

We invite you to read this booklet to see what Social Security offers you. The booklet is not intended as a complete explanation of the Social Security program. It's a guide to those provisions that are, or can be, of particular interest to **you and every woman**. You may want to keep this booklet for future reference.

Social Security's  
Toll-Free Number  
**1-800-772-1213**

Internet: <http://www.ssa.gov>

## What's Inside

	Page
<i>Part 1—When You're Employed Or Self-Employed .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Part 2—Some Special Employment Situations ....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Part 3—When You Retire .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Part 4—If You've Never Been Employed .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Part 5—When You Have Income From A Government Pension .....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Part 6—When Your Marital Status Changes .....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Part 7—You Also Need To Know .....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Part 8—When You Need More Information About Social Security .....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Part 9—Your Personal Information Is Safe With Social Security .....</i>	<i>18</i>

## Part 1—When You're Employed Or Self-Employed

**When you work and pay Social Security taxes**, you earn Social Security credits that can qualify you and your family for disability and survivors insurance coverage. You have this coverage whether you work for an employer or whether you are self-employed. You're also earning credits toward your retirement benefits. In addition, you're earning Medicare protection for yourself and your family in the event you, or they, ever need dialysis treatment or a kidney transplant. You're also earning Medicare protection that will be available when you reach age 65.

**If you become disabled** and can't work for at least a year or your disability is expected to result in death, you can get disability benefits provided you have worked long enough under Social Security. Your disability payments would start with the sixth full month of your disability—there's a five-month waiting period—and would continue as long as you are disabled. If you receive disability payments for 24 consecutive months you also will have Medicare protection.

When you're disabled, your unmarried children can get benefits, too. Monthly checks are payable to your biological or legally adopted children, or dependent stepchildren or grandchildren who—

- are under age 18;
- become disabled before age 22 and remain disabled; or
- are age 18 to 19 and attending elementary or secondary school full time.

If you are married and your husband is age 62 or older, he may qualify for payments if you become disabled. He may qualify at any age if he is caring for your child, who is under age 16 or disabled and entitled to benefits.

**When you die**, both your widower and your dependent children may receive monthly survivors benefits. A one-time payment of \$255 also may be payable to your widower or dependent children.

If there are no dependent children, your widower must be either age 60 or older or between the ages of 50 and 60 and disabled to qualify for benefits on your work record. If you have dependent parents age 62 or older, they may be eligible for payments when you die.

## Part 2—Some Special Employment Situations

If you and your husband own and operate a business together and you expect to share in the profits and losses, you may be entitled to receive Social Security credits as a partner. This may be true even if you and your husband have no formal partnership agreement. To receive credit for your share of the business income, you must file a separate self-employment return (Schedule SE), even though you and your husband file a joint income tax return. If you don't file a separate Schedule SE, all the earnings from the business will be reported under your husband's Social Security number. In that case, your Social Security record will not show your earnings, and you may not receive Social Security credits for them.

**If you are a household worker**, your wages are covered under Social Security if you earn \$1,000 or more in 1997 (including cash for transportation expenses) unless you were under age 18 during any part of the year and household work is not your principal job.

Household workers include babysitters, maids, cooks, laundry workers, butlers, gardeners, chauffeurs, people who do housecleaning or repair work or anyone employed in or around someone else's home.

You should show your employer your Social Security card and ask him or her to withhold Social Security taxes from your wages, pay an equal amount and send the combined taxes to the Internal Revenue Service with a report of the wages paid. If the wages aren't reported, you won't earn Social Security credit for your work. If you don't have enough Social Security credits, you and your family won't be able to get monthly benefits on your wage record when you retire, or if you become disabled or die. It's important that your earnings are reported even if you already have enough Social Security credits to entitle you to benefits. The amount of your benefit is based on your covered earnings over a period of years. If several years of earnings are omitted, your benefit may be lower than it would be if all your earnings are reported.

**If you have served in the military** on active duty or on inactive duty for training since 1957, you have paid into Social Security. Inactive duty service in the Armed Forces Reserves and National Guard weekend drills has been covered by Social Security since 1988. If you served in the military before 1957, you did not pay into Social Security directly, but your records may be credited with special earnings for Social Security purposes that count toward any benefits you may be entitled to receive.

When you apply for Social Security, the credits you receive for military service are added to your civilian work credits. The number of credits you have determines whether you qualify for Social Security.

You may be eligible for both Social Security benefits and military retirement. Generally, there is no offset of Social Security benefits because of your military retirement. You will get your full Social Security benefit based on your earnings. Your Social Security benefit may be reduced, however, if you also receive a pension from a job in which you did not pay Social Security taxes.

Social Security survivors benefits may affect benefits payable under the optional Department of Defense Survivors Benefit Plan. You should check with the Department of Defense or your military retirement advisor for more information.

## Part 3—When You Retire

**You may be able to get Social Security benefits** as early as age 62, but your benefit will be permanently reduced to take account of the longer time that you will receive checks. If you wait until 65 to retire, you'll be eligible for full retirement benefits. (Starting in 2003, the age at which full benefits are payable will be increased gradually until it reaches age 66 in 2009 and age 67 in 2027.)

If you're married, you can receive retirement benefits on your own record or spouse's benefits on your husband's. Your husband can get retirement benefits at age 62 or older, either on his record, or as a spouse on your record. People who are eligible for benefits on more than one work record generally receive the larger benefit amount. (The same rule applies to children who are eligible for benefits on both parents' record.)

If you've had high earnings, it's likely that your own benefits will be higher than a spouse's benefit. On the other hand, if you stopped working for several years or had low earnings, the spouse's benefit may be higher. At age 65, a wife receives 50 percent of what her husband



is entitled to at age 65. When you apply for retirement benefits, a Social Security representative can tell you whether you will get a higher benefit on your own record or on your husband's.

If you earned your own Social Security credits, you have certain options at retirement. For example, suppose your husband continues to work past age 65 and doesn't collect Social Security benefits. You can retire and get benefits based on your own record. Then when he retires, you can receive benefits on his record if they would be higher.

Or, you can take reduced benefits on your wage record before age 65. If you do, your benefit will always be reduced—even if you take reduced benefits on your own record and then take wife's benefits when your husband retires. The same benefit rules and options apply to a husband who's eligible for retirement benefits on both his own and his wife's work record.

Your husband may qualify for benefits on your work record at any age if he is caring for your child who is under age 16 or disabled and entitled to benefits. When you retire, your children can qualify for benefits on your record if they meet the same conditions as if you were disabled (see Page 4).

It's easy to learn whether you're eligible to receive Social Security and the amount of monthly benefits you may get. Just call Social Security's toll-free number, **1-800-772-1213** (anytime), to ask for a *Request for a Personal Earnings and Benefit Estimate Statement*. You can expect to receive your statement about four weeks after Social Security receives your completed request. You also may want to call the toll-free number during business hours (7 a.m. to 7 p.m.) or visit your local Social Security office to discuss your benefit eligibility on your record or your spouse's record.

**You'll have Medicare coverage in addition to Social Security benefits.** If you're entitled to benefits—either on your own record or on your husband's record—you will have Medicare hospital insurance (Part A) protection automatically at age 65. If you're not entitled to benefits and you don't have enough credits, you can pay a monthly premium to buy hospital insurance coverage and Medicare medical insurance (Part B).

## Part 4—If You've Never Been Employed

**You may be eligible for spouse's benefits if you are married.** If you make your home and family your career, you and your family have Social Security protection through your husband's work. You can receive benefits when he retires, becomes disabled or dies.

You can receive benefits if you are caring for a child who is under age 16 or disabled and entitled to benefits. If you don't have a child in your care, you must be age 62 or older to get benefits when your husband becomes disabled or retires.

If you choose to begin receiving retirement benefits before age 65, your benefit amount will be permanently reduced. If you wait until you're age 65, you'll get the full wife's benefits, which is 50 percent of the amount your husband is entitled to at age 65. (The age at which full benefits are payable will increase in the future. See Page 7.)

You and your husband will have Medicare hospital insurance at age 65 if he is entitled to monthly benefits, and you both can sign up for medical insurance. You will have Medicare at age 65 even if your husband is younger

than you and still working, provided he is at least age 62 and will be entitled to benefits when he retires. You can file an application for hospital insurance a few months before you reach age 65.

(While your husband is working, he earns credits toward Medicare protection for your family in the event any of you ever need dialysis treatment or a kidney transplant for permanent kidney failure. Also, if he becomes disabled and is entitled to benefits for 24 months, he would have Medicare protection.)

## Part 5—When You Have Income From A Government Pension

**If you're getting both Social Security benefits and a government pension, your Social Security benefits may be reduced.** Two provisions of the law affect the amount of benefits paid to someone who also receives a pension for work that was not covered by Social Security.

One provision, called **government pension offset**, applies only if you receive a pension as a retired government worker for work not covered by Social Security and you are also eligible for Social Security benefits as a spouse or widow. The offset may reduce your spouse's or widow's benefit by two-thirds of the amount of your government pension. For example, if you get a monthly civil service pension of \$600, two-thirds of it—\$400—must be used to offset your Social Security spouse's or widow's benefits. So, if you're eligible for a \$500 widow's benefit, you'll receive \$100 per month from Social Security (\$500 less \$400 = \$100).

Why a pension offset? Social Security spouse's benefits are intended for a nonworking, dependent spouse. They are not intended for a spouse who has a substantial pension based on her/his own work that is not covered by Social Security.

There are exceptions to the present rule. To learn about those exceptions and other information on the pension offset, call or visit Social Security to ask for the factsheet, *Government Pension Offset* (Publication No. 05-10007).

The other provision, called **windfall elimination**, applies if you receive a pension for work not covered by Social Security, and you also have enough Social Security work credits to get a retired-worker or disability benefit. In this case, a special formula is used to figure your Social Security benefit.

Benefits under the special formula are lower than under the regular formula. Here's why: Before 1983, benefits for employees who had some work in jobs not covered by Social Security were computed as if they were long-term, low-wage workers. Because the regular formula gives lower-paid workers a higher percentage return than higher-paid people, dually entitled beneficiaries received the advantage of the higher Social Security benefits in addition to their other pension. The modified formula eliminates this "windfall."

For more information about the windfall elimination provision, contact Social Security to ask for the factsheet, *A Pension From Work Not Covered By Social Security* (Publication No. 05-10045).

## Part 6—When Your Marital Status Changes

If your husband dies, you can receive widow's benefits if you are age 60 or older. If you're disabled, you can get widow's benefits as early as age 50.

The amount of your monthly payment will depend on your age when you start getting benefits. It also will depend on the amount your deceased husband would have been entitled to, or was receiving, when he died.

Widow's benefits range from 71½ percent of the deceased husband's benefit amount, if they begin at age 60, to 100 percent, if they begin at age 65. So, if you start receiving benefits at age 65, you'll get 100 percent of the amount your husband would be receiving if he were still alive. (Starting in 2005, the age at which the 100 percent widow's benefit is payable will be increased gradually until it reaches age 66 in 2011 and age 67 in 2029.)

If you are a disabled widow between the ages of 50 and 59, your monthly benefit would be 71½ percent of your deceased husband's benefit amount.

The following are some points to remember:

- If you are entitled to retirement benefits on your own work record, you can take reduced retirement payments at age 62 and then receive the full widow's benefit at age 65.
- If you are eligible for benefits on your own work record, you may want to take reduced widow's benefits until you are age 65 and file a claim for retirement benefits on your own record.
- If you delay your retirement beyond age 65, your future benefits will increase each year by a certain percentage. For example, if you were born in 1935, your benefit will increase six percent each year you delay retirement between ages 65 and 70.

A Social Security representative can tell you which choice would be to your advantage.

**As a widow, you also may be eligible for Medicare.** You will be eligible for Medicare at age 65 if your husband would have been entitled to monthly benefits or had worked long enough under Social Security before his death. You should apply for Medicare about three months before you reach age 65.

**If you remarry, you will continue to receive benefits** on your deceased husband's Social Security record. However, if your current husband is a Social Security beneficiary, you may want to apply for a wife's benefit on his record if it would be larger than your widow's benefit. You cannot get both.

**If you are a widow with children,** you may be eligible for a widow's benefit at any age when you are caring for a child who is under age 16 or disabled and entitled to benefits. Unmarried children may receive survivors benefits on your husband's record until they are age 18, or until age 19 if they are attending elementary or secondary school full time.

Your benefits will stop when you no longer have a child under age 16 or disabled in your care. Usually, your benefits also will stop if you remarry, but there are some exceptions to this rule (see above). Benefits to your children will continue as long as they remain eligible for payments, even if you remarry.

If you are age 50 or older and getting Social Security benefits because you have young children in your care, you are eligible for Medicare if you become disabled. Even though you haven't applied for benefits based on the disability (because you are already receiving benefits as a mother), you may be eligible for Medicare if you have been disabled for 24 months or longer.

## **If You Are Divorced**

---

You can receive benefits on your ex-husband's Social Security record if he is receiving Social Security benefits (or is deceased); and

- your marriage lasted 10 years or longer;
- you are presently unmarried; and
- you are age 62 or older (**if he is deceased**, you can collect benefits at age 60 and age 50 if you become disabled).

If your ex-husband has not applied for benefits, but can qualify for them and is age 62 or older, you can receive benefits on his record if you have been divorced from him for at least two years and meet the requirements listed above.

If your ex-husband is deceased, you can receive benefits on his record even though you were not married to him for 10 years —

- if you are caring for his child who also is your natural or legally adopted child and is under age 16 or disabled; and
- you are unmarried.

Your benefits will continue until the child reaches age 16 or the child's disability ceases.

The amount of benefits you receive as a divorced spouse does not affect the amount of benefits another spouse receives on your ex-husband's record.

Many women get a higher benefit based on their ex-husband's work record than they get on their own record, especially if he is deceased. If you've never asked Social Security about receiving benefits on your ex-husband's record, you should do so. When you apply,

you'll need to give his Social Security number. If you don't know his number, you'll need to provide his date and place of birth and his parents' names.

**(Note: the same conditions apply to a divorced husband whose eligibility for benefits is based on his ex-wife's Social Security record.)**

## Part 7—You Also Need To Know

**Make sure that your Social Security record shows your correct name.** This is especially important if you are employed because your employer reports your earnings under the name you supply.

Whenever you change the name you use in employment—whether because of marriage, divorce or other reasons—be sure to report the change to Social Security. Otherwise, your earnings may not be properly recorded and you may not receive all the Social Security credit due you for your work.

Even if you don't work, you should report any name change so that your record will show the correct name when you apply for benefits.

To report a name change, fill out an *Application For A Social Security Number Card* (Form SS-5). You will have to show proof of identity under both your old name and your new name. If you were born outside the United States, you also may need to show evidence of U.S. citizenship or lawful alien status. You can get the form from any Social Security office or by calling Social Security's toll-free number, **1-800-772-1213**, anytime.

**If you hire a household worker**, you're responsible for seeing that wages you pay him or her are properly reported. You must deduct Social Security taxes from the wages if you pay the person \$1,000 or more during the



year. (The amount is indexed for inflation and could rise in future years.) You must pay an equal amount of tax because you are the employer and send the combined taxes to the Internal Revenue Service. You can report the earnings and pay the taxes when you file your federal income tax return.

For more information about household employees, ask for a copy of the factsheet entitled *Household Workers* (Publication No. 05-10021) at any Social Security office or call our toll-free number, 1-800-772-1213, and ask to have one sent to you.

**If you are 65 or older, blind or disabled** and your income and the value of the things you own are below certain limits, you may be eligible to receive monthly payments under the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. Generally, to receive SSI, you must be living in the U.S. or the Northern Mariana Islands and be a U.S. citizen. Certain noncitizens also may be eligible. To learn more about SSI, ask for a copy of *Supplemental Security Income* (Publication No. 05-11000) at any Social Security office or call our toll-free number, 1-800-772-1213, and ask to have one sent to you.

## Part 8—When You Need More Information About Social Security

Recorded information and services are available 24 hours a day including weekends and holidays, by calling Social Security's toll-free number, **1-800-772-1213**. You can call for an appointment or to speak to a service representative between the hours of 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on business days. Our lines are busiest early in the week and early in the month so, if your business can wait, it's best to call at other times. Whenever you call, have your Social Security number handy.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing may call our toll-free "TTY" number, 1-800-325-0778, between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on business days.

Social Security information is also available to users of the Internet. Type <http://www.ssa.gov> to access Social Security information on the Internet.

The Social Security Administration treats all calls confidentially—whether they're made to our toll-free numbers or to one of our local offices. We also want to ensure that you receive accurate and courteous service. That is why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some incoming and outgoing telephone calls.

## Part 9—Your Personal Information Is Safe With Social Security

Social Security keeps personal information on millions of people. That information—such as your Social Security number, earnings record, age and address—is personal and confidential. Generally, we will discuss this information only with you. When you call, we'll ask you several questions to help us verify your personal identity. We need your permission if you want someone else to help with your Social Security business.

If you ask a friend or family member to call Social Security, you need to be with them when they call so we will know that you want them to help. The Social Security representative will ask your permission to discuss your Social Security business with that person.

If you send a friend or family member to our local office to conduct your Social Security business, send your written consent with them. Only with your written permission can Social Security discuss your personal information with them and provide the answers to your questions.

In the case of a minor child, the natural parent or legal guardian can act on the child's behalf in taking care of the child's Social Security business.

We urge you to be careful with your Social Security number and to protect its confidentiality whenever possible. Although we can't prevent others from asking for your Social Security number, you should know that your Social Security records are kept private.

There are times when the law requires Social Security to give information to other government agencies to conduct other government health or welfare programs—such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Medicaid and food stamps. Programs receiving information from Social Security are prohibited from sharing that information.



**Social Security Administration**

SSA Publication No. 05-10127

July 1997 (*Recycle prior editions*)

ICN 480067

Unit of Issue — HD (one hundred)



**Printed on recycled paper**